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ABSTRACT

Social scientists have traditionally assumed that marriage and widowhood are the crucial life events for women, and that retirement has no effect on women's social relationships. To explore the relationship between women's work status and perception of peer and power relationships, a thematic apperceptive procedure was used. A sample of 1,428 respondents was interviewed, including 802 women randomly selected from two larger samples used in a 1957 study and a 1976 replication. The same apperceptive pictures were used in both the 1957 and 1976 studies. Preliminary analysis of the data on the relationship between work status and status perception showed a highly significant association between women's work status and interpersonal orientations in 1976, suggesting that historical changes have occurred since 1957 in the meaning of work and retirement for women. Retired women showed a sharp increase in concerns about power, powerlessness, and status, and a corresponding decline in orientations towards peers and affiliative pursuits. These findings suggest important clinical and social policy implications for those concerned with the social needs of women during retirement. (JAC)

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The Effects of Contemporary Changes in Work and Retirement on Women's Preferences for Power and Peer Relations[1]

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THE EFFECTS OF CONTEMPORARY CHANGES IN WORK AND RETIREMENT ON WOMEN'S PREFERENCES FOR POWER AND PEER RELATIONS

The relationship between women's work status and perception of peer and power relationships is explored through a thematic apperceptive procedure. A sample of 1,428 respondents, including 802 women, randomly selected from two larger representative national samples utilized in a 1957 study and in a replication of that study in 1976 is utilized. A highly significant association appears between work status and interpersonal orientation in 1976, and suggests that historical changes have occurred in the meaning of work and retirement for women since 1957. Retired women show a sharp historical increase in concerns about power, powerlessness, and status, and a corresponding decline in orientations toward peers and affiliative pursuits. These findings have important clinical and social policy implications for those concerned with the social needs of women during retirement.

Traditionally, social scientists (Cumming and Henry, 1960; Blau, 1973) have acted on the premise that the crucial life events are marriage and widowhood for women, and work and retirement for men. For example, Blau contends--and her data corroborate--that retirement has no effect on the extent of women's involvement with friends and peers.

Most research in this area has ignored the potential impact of historical effects which affect all age groups equally and are primarily indications of social conditions existing at the time at which the data are collected. The samples of older people used in those studies include women born in the late 1800's, when few women worked and retired. These and other historical factors may partially explain the minimal effects of work and retirement observed in studies conducted in the 1950's and 1960's. Failure to account for these types of effects may result in findings from research which are only artifacts reflecting current social and economic conditions, and in practice techniques and values which are no longer appropriate.

Contrary to the traditional view, women's retirement from the work force produces significant changes in their lives (Atchley, 1976; Streib and Schneider, 1971; Holahan, 1981). There is evidence that career-oriented women are beginning to develop social networks similar to the restricted character of men's networks following retirement or widowhood (Lowenthal, et al, 1967). As a result of these changes, researchers and clinicians interested in developmental and gender components of social network participation must study such phenomena within the context of historical influences, and consider these potentially competing but equally plausible effects in interpreting data indicative of developmental and sex-role changes.

In accordance with this perspective, two important questions emerge: (1) what is the relationship between women's work status and their orientation to informal relationships, specifically in same status peer relations when contrasted with different status, hierarchical associations? and (2) have social structural changes over the past twenty years influenced this process?

Method

Participants

This investigation is based upon a sample of 1,427 respondents randomly selected from two larger representative national samples of American men and women. These larger samples are from a 1957 study (Gurin, et al, 1960) and from a replication of that study in 1976 (Veroff, et al, 1981). The sample accurately reflects a cross-section of persons 21 years of age or older living in private households in the United States and includes approximately 802 women and 625 men. Reflecting demographic changes from 1957 to 1976, the sample set of 1976 contains a larger proportion of the young, the elderly, the retired, the college-educated and women working outside the home.

Procedures

Trained interviewers from the University of Michigan Survey Research Center conducted 90 minute structured interviews based upon questionnaires to collect data in a wide variety of areas ranging from demographic information to marital and work problems. The interviewers also administered a thematic apperceptive procedure, employing the same apperceptive pictures in both 1957 and 1976. For preliminary analysis, one picture selected for its ability to elicit responses of peership and status differences is used for analysis in

this investigation. This is a picture of four modestly dressed women, with one standing and three sitting facing each other.

Respondents were asked to tell a story by answering four basic questions: (1) Who are these people and what are they doing? (2) What has led up to this; what went on before? (3) What do they want, and how do they feel? and (4) What will happen, and how will it end?

Coders who were blind to the research questions of this investigation were hired and trained by expert coders. Each coder was assigned to one picture and was supervised by one expert coder, who coded 10 randomly selected responses of every 100 responses coded by the novice. Coding reliabilities, computed by estimating the percentage of agreement between novice and expert across all variables for each card and picture, average in the 90% range.

Response Variable: All social settings present a wide range of such status criteria as sex, age, and income. In this investigation, "status" is operationally defined somewhat more specifically as the role position or power rank existing formally between two or more mentioned characters and may be coded as different status or same status. A relationship between two characters is considered different status, or vertical, if at least one of the characters has an occupational or formal authority standing which gives that character power over the other, so that the relationship is asymmetrical and unequal with respect to power. For example, a story coded as having characters of different status begins:

> Workman and supervisor in an 'old-timey' workshop. Workman doing something with that piece of equipment. . . . Boss wants it fixed; boss exasperated with worker and worker trying to finish it, but wishes boss would get out of the way. . . .

A relationship between same status characters or peers is coded where there is explicit reference to characters occupying similar roles, such as co-workers, or to informal affiliative roles, such as buddies or companions.

Approximately one-third of the total sample, who did not mention status differences or peers are excluded from consideration. The analysis focuses only on those respondents who refer to these two types of relationships. Those who do not make such references tended to mention other roles, such as family relations, or their responses were too vague to code. Although a systematic analysis of this non-response group was not undertaken in this investigation, previously reported studies which utilized the data from the thematic apperception procedure indicate that in the case of subjects who provided inadequate protocols, they tended to be less educated (Veroff, et al, 1980). Veroff and his associates found that those with only a grade school education more frequently offered incomplete responses. As a result, the sample included in this study is biased in favor of the more educated respondents.

Explanatory Variables: These include work status and year. Respondents' work status as reported by the questionnaire is coded as working, housewife, retired, student, and unemployed for females. In this study, the categories of work, housewife, and retired are analyzed.

The year variable includes the two separate interview years involved in this investigation; this variable is accordingly coded as 1957 or 1976, and is utilized to control for historical effects.

Validation Variables: A total of twelve variables are utilized for construct validation: seven drawn from the thematic apperceptive procedure; two motive measures coded in an independent study and three questionnaire items

concerned with affiliation (Veroff, et al, 1980).

The seven variables drawn from the thematic apperceptive procedure include: reference to age; reference to shared activity between characters; mention of feelings of powerlessness; mention of deprivation; defined as any deficit of something needed or desired; type of need; and type of affect. The two motive measures, need for affiliation and need for power, are coded according to the procedures described in Atkinson (1958). Three variables from the questionnaire selected for validity analyses include the following items: (1) how often do you get together with your friends or relatives--things like going out together or visiting in each others' homes? (2) Do you feel you have as many friends as you want or would you like to have more friends? (3) How many organizations do you belong to?

Construct Validation of Response Variables[1]

A major criticism leveled at research using thematic apperceptive methods is its frequent failure to acquire evidence validating proposed measures. A construct validation analysis is accordingly employed using chi-square statistics to assess the adequacy of the response variable, perception of different status relationships versus perception of peerships. Its purpose is to examine whether the apperceptive responses tend to measure what they are designed to measure. This validation analysis can assure that the apperceptive data reflect themes which are salient to the respondent. If perception of peership is a valid construct, it should be related to age similarity, shared

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[1] Detailed descriptions of results from the validity analysis are presented in a separate paper entitled, "Construct Validation of Imaginative Assessment of Family Orientation and Status Perception: Theoretical and Methodological Implications for the Thematic Apperceptive Test," Educational and Psychological Measurement, in press.

skill attainment, and sociability; perception of different status relations should similarly be associated with age differences, disparate skill performances, power concerns, and low level of interest in social-affiliative activities.

As expected, results for all pictures indicate that peership responses are associated with references to shared activity, while different status responses are associated with references to individualized activity. The p value is less than .001 in all pictures. The correlations between status perception and need for power are strong and significant in all pictures--.25 in Picture A, -.37 in Picture B, -.65 in Picture C, -.38 in Picture D, and -.25 in Picture E. Those who mention peers exhibit low power motivation while those who make reference to different status reveal much higher motives for power; previous research has found that orientations toward power arise from feelings of weakness and powerlessness. Among women, perceptions of different status are significantly related to references to deprivation ($p < .001$). With the exception of Picture E, significant associations ($p < .02$) between peership and age similarity, and between peership and high affiliation motivation ($p \leq .05$) occur in each picture having sufficient responses for statistical analyses; conversely, different status perceptions are related to age differences, influence activities, and low needs for affiliation. These results suggest that the constructs are valid, and they distinguish responses involving same-status or peer affiliative relationships from responses involving different status or hierarchical power-oriented relationships.

Results

The findings which are presented in Table 1 are from a preliminary analysis of the relationship between work status and status perception in Picture

#3, a group affiliative picture. First, the results from a chi-square analysis of status perception and women's status in both 1957 and 1976 indicates that 14% of the working women perceived status differences among the characters while only 9% of the housewives mentioned such differences. Women who are retired see the most: 41% of these women perceived characters which are of different status. The contingency coefficient is .20, indicating that the strength of this relationship is moderate.

The second set of findings reveals the relationship between status perception and women's status when year of interview is introduced as a control. Although the trends are similar, the association is statistically significant only in 1976. In 1957, the percentages of references to status differences among working women, housewives and retired women are, respectively, 12%, 9%, and 20%; in 1976, they are 15%, 8%, and 48%. What is most interesting about the differences between the two years is that there is a 20% increase in references to status differences from 1957 to 1976 among retired women from 20% to 48% and concomitant decrease in the salience of peer relations from 80% to 52%. The strength of the association is also stronger in 1976 than in 1957--from .06 to .27.

Discussion and Implications

The finding that work status influences women's perceptions of peerships and status relationships contradicts previous studies which claim that work and retirement have no effect on women's involvement in informal relationships; however, this association is statistically significant only in 1976, supporting the assertion that historical changes in the meaning of work for women has occurred over the past twenty years.

The sources of concern about power and status differences among retired women probably lie in the association between these relationships and feelings of powerlessness and subjective experiences of status inequality. As working women grow older they may become increasingly aware of their relative powerlessness in the society, and retired women, who are particularly prone to perceptions of status differences, may be the most aware of the ways in which they have been deprived of power and status. Conversely, peerships are highly accessible to working and retired women; needs for affiliation are less salient for this group.

The historical increase in retired women's references to status differences may be explained by the greater involvement of women in their work. Since 1957, the aggregate change in women's employment and commitment to careers has been dramatic (Veroff, et al, 1981). It is thus not surprising that status and power are more salient issues to women who have worked.

The differences in income among men and women in the later years may also account for the increase in these concerns among women who are retired. Although many individuals experience a major drop of income during later life, the largest amount of poverty in old age is found among members of minority groups and women (Zarit, 1980). Many of the jobs at which women worked--such as domestic work--were only recently included in the Social Security Program, so that many women who are now retired and who did that type of work do not receive Social Security (Zarit, 1980).

The findings from this investigation also indicate that housewives are the most peer-oriented. According to Weiss, this group of women tends to be the most socially isolated (Weiss, 1973), and increases in geographic mobility over the last twenty years have made these women particularly vulnerable to

friendship and peer deprivation. Their need for companionship and sociability remains high. They are also less frequently confronted with the daily frustrations and obstacles inherent in the working world.

As stated previously, the findings reported here are from a preliminary analysis of the relationship between work and retirement and orientation to status differences or peerships. Further analyses of these issues must consider the following: First, all thematic apperceptive test pictures need to be included. Second, controls for age must be considered. Specifically, it would be useful to focus on older women who are over the age of 55 or 65 and then compare women who are retired with women who are housewives with respect to their orientation to relationships of different status and peerships. The analysis is limited, however, by the small sample size of retired women. In 1957, there were only 5 women in the sample who reported that they were retired. Where possible, it would be important to incorporate controls for health, income, and education, all of which are critical influences in later life.

In summary, the findings from this preliminary analysis serve as a reminder that contrary to previous assumptions, a woman's work status--whether she is working, remains at home, or is retired--does affect her orientation to sociability and informal relations. These results have important implications for clinicians working with older women. Too frequently, practitioners assume that explanations for psychological difficulties women may experience in adapting to life crises lie within the interpersonal realm; interventions then revolve around ameliorating affiliation needs rather than on addressing concerns about status and power. The transition from work to retirement can be as disruptive for women as for men or, in many cases, a more

difficult transition for women. The influence of work and retirement on women's involvement in their social network will become increasingly important in the future and as evidenced by the data presented in this report, times have already changed.

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Table 1: Chi-Square Relationship Between Work Status and Status Perception in 1957 and 1976 Among Women in Picture 3

Work Status		Status Perception (Both Years)			
	(N)	% Different Status	% Peers	Total	p value
Working women	(193)	14%	86%	100%	
Housewives	(249)	9%	91%	100%	$p<.0001$
Retired women	(22)	41%	59%	100%	

Work Status		Status Perception (1957)			
	(N)	% Different Status	% Peers	Total	p value
Working women	(77)	12%	88%	100%	
Housewives	(166)	9%	91%	100%	NS
Retired women	(5)	20%	80%	100%	

Work Status		Status Perception (1976)			
	(N)	% Different Status	% Peers	Total	p value
Working women	(116)	15%	85%	100%	
Housewives	(83)	8%	92%	100%	$p<.0002$
Retired women	(17)	48%	52%	100%	